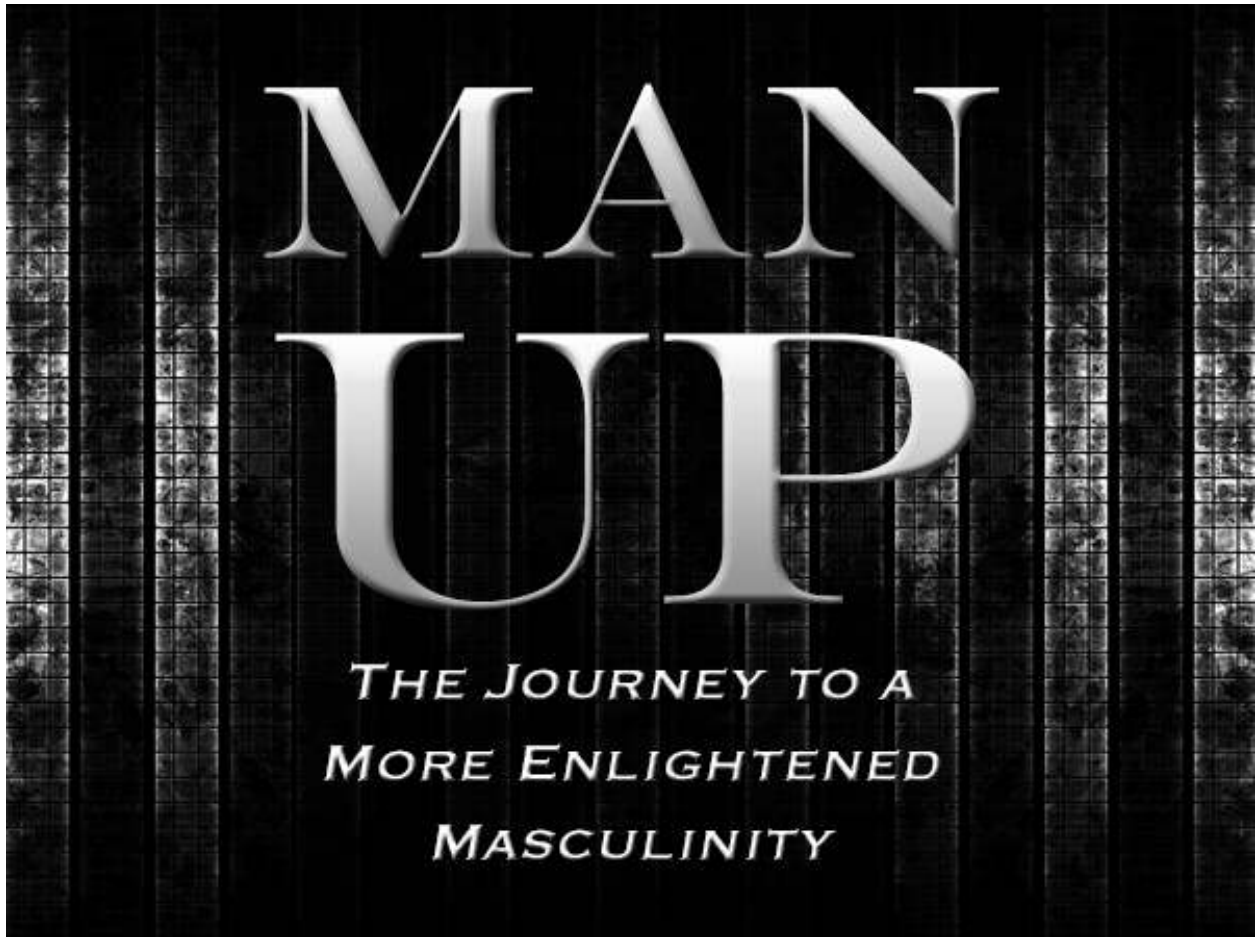


Man Up: The Journey to a More Enlightened Masculinity

Robert Augustus Masters and Ken Wilber



Our world places some unforgiving restrictions upon men when it comes to the avenues of self-discovery and self-expression available to them. The more we can begin opening these avenues to men, the better the world will be.

This is what makes this discussion so important. Robert and Ken disclose a newly emerging path for men in the 21st century, one that allows “softer” qualities like sensitivity, openness, and compassion to actually *enhance* and *deepen* a man’s sense of masculinity, rather than diminish it. It is a discussion that brings some much-needed relief to a seldom-acknowledged pain so many men feel in their hearts, minds, and guts.

PART 1: TO BE A MAN

Ken: Hello!

Robert: Hey, Ken.

Ken: How are you, Robert?

Robert: Good.

Ken: Well, we are here to discuss your perceptive book, “To Be a Man: A Guide to True Masculine Power.” Now let me ask you, this is such a dicey, delicate area to get into and, you know, all sorts of political landmines. What makes you decide to take this topic on?

Robert: Well actually, I didn't decide to take it on, originally. I hadn't even thought of it. I was busy doing a book on shadow. Another one was started on sex. And then Tami Simon, from Sounds True, got ahold of me and said, “We're thinking of having someone do a book on men. We thought of you. Are you into it?” And I said, “Yes.” I'd never even considered doing a book on men, but once I got into it, it just grabbed ahold of me. I know it's a dicey area, and it takes a certain finesse. But I've worked with men for so long, down in the trenches, so to speak, I realized I had a lot to say about men and men's work and what it meant to be a man, and all the obstacles to fully embodying our true manhood—all of that.

So I did a first draft very quickly. I write very fast. And I ended up doing two major edits on it—a developmental edit, then a regular edit. And it exhausted me in a really good way. But it took everything I had. I could not work on anything else, except my psychotherapeutic work. And when I finished, I had no energy to write any more books. I haven't finished anything since. It just took everything from me, which I'm glad to have given. Now I'm just doing my therapeutic work and my

training work. And I haven't written more than a few words in the last three of four months. It used me up.

Ken: Holy mackerel!

Robert: I'm glad I've done it. But I'm almost 67. I go, 'This—it's time.' This is a great gesture. And I'm really hoping it has a beneficial impact on a lot of men.

Ken: Right. We're the same age, by the way. So, the book itself covers a lot of area, but you divide it into five parts. And the parts are: "Orientation and Groundwork." And then Part II is, "Power and the Modern Man: Anger, Aggression, and the Hero." Part III, "Relational Intimacy." Part IV, "Sex." Part V, "Wrapping Up."

So we'll sort of start with just getting a general sense. From the introduction:

BE A MAN! ... Men—and boys—who are on the receiving end of 'be a man!' get the message that they are lacking in certain factors that supposedly constitute manliness.

And what are some of these factors? Showing no weakness; emotional stoicism; aggressiveness; holding it together and not losing face, no matter what's going on; sucking it up."

What's not allowed is, "vulnerability, empathy, emotional transparency and literacy, the capacity for relational intimacy—these are all qualities more associated with being female than male."

Your overall view, which we'll refine considerably as we go along, is, in one initial statement:

True masculine power is rooted in a dynamic blend of ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ attributes—showing up as a potent alignment of head, heart, and guts. When head (thinking, rationality, analysis), heart (caring, compassion, love), and guts (resolve, resilience, bravery) all inform each other and work together, a truly healthy manhood cannot help but arise.”

So one of the first things we are getting about manhood is that it’s certainly a synthesis of the things traditionally taken to be masculine, but also things traditionally not taken to be masculine. And that’s part of the challenge, isn’t it?

Robert: Exactly, the second set is mostly a recoil against the hardness of first set. A lot of men go too far towards the rail, with the softness, vulnerability & tenderness, and almost institutionalize those things. That becomes a type of subtle armor. It keeps them “removed,” safely removed from their darker dimensions, their more potent energies, their forcefulness, their anger. And I think, as you just read from my stuff, the true man, a man who is awakening to his full self, has to embody both of these in a way that is balanced, and where there is an eye kept on both. Not too hard, not too soft. And being vulnerable is great, but if one is vulnerable without enough spine, one collapses in it.

I see so many men that come to work with us who are in either camp. It’s like a joy to introduce them to the other camp and say, “You know what? There’s something really good here. There’s something really good about this hard tough guy you’re kind of afraid of.” And to the other guys, “There’s something to be said for getting vulnerable.” You’re more soft. You’re more empathetic. It’s not just an intellectual journey, of course. It involves ones full participation on every level.

Ken: You say:

“Telling a man that he’s soft is usually far from a compliment. Softness—or perceived softness—is ordinarily taken to be a failing for men (and boys and youths), a sign of being gutless or spineless, a damning proof of emasculation... Men nonetheless *need* to soften, and also to strip “softening” of its negative connotations. Yes, a man can be overly soft, marooned from power and the capacity for rock-solid firmness, but softness itself makes possible vulnerability, empathy, compassion, emotional literacy, and genuinely deep connections with others. Softness does not necessarily mean an absence of courage! To be unapologetically vulnerable it is not to be unmanned, but to be deepened in your manhood.”

So, to say “soft,” for a man, a typical man, is to say gay, feminine, spineless, cowardly, not manly. In fact, softness is probably about the most non-manly quality there is. Hence, one of the very last things men will be willing to identify with is softness. Yet, if vulnerability, empathy, compassion, emotional literacy, and genuinely deep connections with others all depend on softness, and authentic manhood depends on all those qualities, we definitely have our work cut out for us here. This is realistically asking a fair amount isn’t it?

Robert: It asks a lot. The good news, really, is that what it asks of a man is that he access his warrior-hood, in the best sense of that word, because it takes a lot of guts for a man, especially an armored man, to move towards his tenderer dimensions—to become more vulnerable, more receptive in, say, relationship, especially. That takes a lot from a man, and it’s kind of a scary journey. There’s a lot of shame to meet along the way. But I often say to men who are starting this journey: This is going to bring out the very best in you, even though at times you’ll feel like it’s bringing out the worst, too. It’s a real hero’s journey.

Ken: “Rarely are men taught that stepping into their power actually *includes* stepping into their softness and vulnerability, but such inclusion is a central component of what constitutes real power (*power* meaning the capacity to take action).”

How is that so, exactly? How is softness part of real power? We saw how it is necessary for compassion, vulnerability, connection, intimacy, and so on. But how so is it part of power? It seems just the opposite of power.

Robert: I think what it does, in part, it opens your field of awareness so there’s not such a narrow focus on what’s before one. Softness allows a more panoramic view of what’s going on, not from a distance, but from up close, so you get more data about what you’re dealing with. So the more data you have running through your system about the other person or the group you are in, the more skillful your response will be—especially if you are grounded and have some guts.

But starting the process, Ken, is the biggest part of the challenge, because when this first starts, a man feels like he’s losing. He doesn’t have the strength. He can’t call on his harder attributes. He basically has to learn to embrace his helplessness—the places in him that are still quite young. And that requires a lot of courage and, ideally, some great support. And also, no shaming—as little shaming as possible from those that are close to that particular man.

Ken: This must be a little bit of a tricky sell. When a man comes to you, first meeting, and he’s sitting down and he’s feeling, let’s say, less of man than he wants to be. He wants to be stronger. He wants to be more powerful. He finds he’s just not getting in touch with that. And you look at him and go, “Yes, okay. Well, what we’re going to learn to be is soft.” How do you get that across, initially, in a way that the guy doesn’t go screaming from the room?

Robert: First of all, of course, I don't begin with that. We connect a little bit, and then I talk about the fact that coming for psychotherapy or deep work, inner work, is a bigger challenge for most men than for most women. There's an increased sense of shame. So, one of the first things I often do is teach the man a little bit about shame. And he's usually surprised to see how prevalent it is in his life and how little he knows about it—including the shame of admitting, "I need help." In other words: "I'm not that competent in certain areas. My wife says this and that about me," or whatever. And, "I have to face the shame."

So, here's the art. In a non-shaming way, I'm going to teach him about shame—historically [through his life] and also how it manifests now—and how easily that shame can turn into withdrawal, dissociation, or aggression. Once we get that out of the way, then we can start to look at what's required. And I'll also introduce him to the notion of what is going to be asked of him—becoming more vulnerable, softer, in many cases also accessing his raw power more, too. Often, they go together. So it's not just a matter of gentle opening. It's also giving him some space to really feel his balls—to really feel himself alive in a full-blooded, masculine way.

At the same time, he's encountering these tender, more-vulnerable dimensions of himself. So the image I often have of this is, the man, on the one hand he's holding that place in him that's soft, tender, frightened & very young. The other hand is out in front of him holding a boundary, as if to say, don't mess with him. I've got your back buddy, and we're going forward. And he's not going to neglect his vulnerability or tenderness, or the boy in him, as he goes forward. He's also not going to let those parts in him run the show or drive the car, so to speak.

So, there's a complexity to it, but when it gets down to ground level, it's actually quite simple. It's about moving toward what's challenging, moving toward what's painful or difficult, at a pace that works for that particular man, so he can digest his experience as he goes. That's my job, is not to push too hard, but I also have to push some. If I just sit nod my head like an active listener, nothing much happens.

Ken: Yeah. Yeah. Then, of course, there's the problem on the other side, as you point out:

“The New Age male (the postmodern or spiritualized version of the nice guy), the sensitive, readily empathetic male, often makes such a virtue out of softness and tenderness and noncompetitiveness that he becomes just as rigid as those whose hardness he deplored; he institutionalizes sensitivity and vulnerability. He can cry, he is not the enemy to his helplessness, he is in touch with his softer dimensions, but he *dissociates* from his raw power, his forcefulness, his more powerful passions. He is a stranger to his guts.

Such a male tends to live from the heart up... At worst he is a pushover, a must-be-positive man presenting himself as a paragon of spiritual values, self-consciously impaled upon his high-minded standards. His model of manhood is basically a reaction to the conventional model. Both suffer from a righteously upheld repression of feeling (anger for the ‘sensitive’ male, sadness/grief for the ‘insensitive’ male). Both are armored, one with hardness, one with softness. Both avoid shame. Both are at war with themselves.”

So, these are the two tricky extremes that we need to walk between when it comes to softness.

Robert: And, yeah, with great care and compassion and skill. Because, within each, there's something very beautiful, somebody very, very necessary for becoming truly whole as a man. But to do that, we have to kind of take the sensitive man and just find out what he associates anger with—usually something dangerous, something bad; something, perhaps, in his childhood that meant the loss of love, etc.—and to deconstruct that; and then to get into it at an emotional level where he starts to get what it feels like to really be in touch with that anger, the stronger passions, and that it doesn't mean the world is gonna fall apart just because he gets really pissed off.

Often, I'll use a gestalt method with a lot of men in this area, where the two faces you're mentioning, these two extremes get to talk to each other. Usually there's a pretty stiff conversation for a while. But if invited properly, there's more and more of a sense, "Hey, that's me over there. Hey, that's me over there." And a wholeness starts to emerge, organically.

But that begins with both types of men turning toward what they've had aversion to—realizing that hardness and softness work together beautifully, just like rationality and emotionality work best when they work together. Let's bring them together. Let's stop mythologizing anger, or treating softness like it means you're not a man, you're less than a man. All that has to be looked at. And most men have not paid enough attention to their conditioning around this—where they got the messages: what they were taught by their parent's example, etc.

So it's a real awakening. It's a very, very embodied awakening required here.

Ken: It seems like both of them, in a sense, have half the picture.

Robert: Yeah.

Ken: So, on the one hand, that, in a sense, is the good news. It's not that they're both totally wrong. They're both halfway there. They just have to fill it out.

Robert: It's a very clear picture of projection. Here's my undesirable qualities projected onto you. It's a real black and white example.

Ken: Right, right. You say:

“Being truly a man is...not so much a successful meeting of cultural standards and expectations as it is an integrity-generating, compassion-deepening *outgrowing of them*, an open-eyed, fully embodied passage through the very patterns and expectations that underlie and generate each cultures—and subcultures—notions of manliness.”

So: “outgrowing.” The clear implication is that culture, itself, is not developmentally well-evolved or grown, but rather remains childish/adolescent, at best. If this is so, doesn't the culture have some growing up to do? And how can a man really grow if his culture, itself, is completely against it?

Robert: He's gonna have to turn a clear eye on it and see where he's bought into it; where he's been unconscious with it. And, Ken, it's like the hero's journey. He has to leave a lot of that behind, turn his back on it for a while, and just set out on his own—until his own definition of manhood starts to operate, rather than the one that's been implanted in him and reinforced through parental and tribal ways.

Ken: Do you do support groups for these individuals?

Robert: Not yet. I have people I've trained that do an awful lot of work with these. I tend to work more directly with individuals that have already done a fair bit of work on themselves, to take them deeper and deeper; and training therapists; and so on.

Ken: Okay. Although you would probably recommend that, as they're trying to get beyond the culture's definitions, and get into some of these more healthy and comprehensive definitions—that any kind of support that they could get would certainly be welcome.

Robert: Yeah, as long as they keep a clear eye on what they've entered into, because it's easy to enter into another form of work that might have a very rigid definition of what it is to be a man. So there's support along the way. But as you know, one can be addicted to the groups that are supposed to free us from addictions. It's a journey that requires more and more open-eyed courage. And along the way, I think we find kindred spirits, in the best sense of that phrase. And the support deepens. But it is a solitary journey to start with. And, as one proceeds, there's a lot of support, as one opens to it.

Ken: “My competitiveness and forcefulness have often been seen to be the way of my growth. But these qualities, these ‘male’ attributes, are just as much me as the tenderness or softness. It's easy to keep them in the dark or reject them, dressing them up in black leather jackets, but not so easy to cultivate intimacy with them, bringing them into the circle of my being, reclaiming and integrating their energies without, however, taking on their viewpoint.”

So here's the point:

“It's so crucial to encounter this dimension of maleness without robbing it of its passion and fighting spirit, allowing it to full-bloodedly...” (And incidentally, “full-blooded” is the most widely-used adjective in this book. It's great.) “...to full-bloodedly expand, permitting it to further energize and to awaken the quintessential man in us... without diluting its intensity one

bit... saying an unqualified yes to the more primitive aspects of maleness...
is the very heart of being a man...”

So, just to check... Previously we were hearing a lot about outgrowing, or moving beyond, or including new stuff like softness and vulnerability. Here, it's a quote of “an unqualified yes” to the more primitive aspects. And that's named as being the very heart of being a man.

Robert: Yeah. And outgrowing doesn't mean abandoning it. It means keeping what's best about that and, in this case, the raw passion. I see so many men, in the name of evolving to a deeper level, push aside the passion. So they become more eviscerated. They've lost touch with something that is so beautiful, I think, in a man—and a woman, too. It's that primal, raw energy. That energy, itself, does not get to lead the way, but we have it in harness. It's there. It's available. It makes us more vital, more alive. And it may seem more primitive at first, but to me it's actually part of our makeup. It's there. And I love my raw passion, in whatever form—coupled with a deeper understanding, so that the viewpoint of that raw energy doesn't take over. It's like in a fight with a partner, it's good to feel that, but you also want to maintain a perspective that can see more so you can handle it skillfully.

For example, if I am angry at my wife, Diane, and my heart's not involved, it doesn't work as well as when I'm angry at her and I'm intense. I'm fiery, but I feel some compassion. There's some sort of compassion coexisting with that anger. That makes her reception of it far more easy. There's more flow. I'm more vulnerable in it. I'm not out to attack or win, or score points. And in that sense, that primitive quality is there and the intensity of my anger, but the compassion that coexists with it allows it to be a very beneficial force.

Ken: Right. And, of course, that's what you want to hear in terms of an overall integrated approach. And I think it's one of the things that men worry about when they go into any sort of therapy; or something about becoming more sensitive, or more caring, or more emotionally literate; or something – it's that they are going have to give up that sort of raw maleness about them. And so, that is certainly not what you are saying.

Robert: No, it's the opposite. Implicit in this, too, is the formation of really healthy boundaries.

Ken: Right.

Robert: So, if I'm a very soft guy and I have incredible empathy and poor boundaries, I'm probably going to get over-absorbed in the other person's emotional state because of that. And I won't know where they end and where I begin. Whereas, if I have a healthy boundary and an empathic wall, so to speak, I can care for them, I can feel what they're feeling, but I also have just enough distance from them so I can still maintain my autonomy.

Ken: Right

Robert: It's so crucial.

Ken: Right. And then, on the chapter on “Navigational Pointers,” [Part I, Ch.2] you say: “What follows...are navigational pointers that you can refer back to when you get stymied, stuck, or off track.” [p 13]

And, I'll just list these so people can know that these are areas that they can come back and check with, because you've already laid it out pretty clearly that this is a journey. It's not something that can be done immediately. It's not something that can be done on a weekend or even a week-long workshop. It's truly a life

changing-course of action, and so it's going to continue, ideally, over a lifetime, but certainly nothing that's going to be done in just a few days.

So, some of the checkpoints here... Like I said, I'll just mention them so people can get a sense of some of the basic areas that are being covered. And we'll go into many of these in detail later.

Shame; vulnerability; empathy; emotional literacy; turning *toward* your pain; distinguishing between anger and aggression; distinguishing thought from feeling; there's more to sex than meets the eye; connecting the dots between your past and present; de-numbing—where you say, “thaw until you're raw.” But those are just some of the areas that people can check back with as they go forward with this general project.

PART 2: SHAME AND SHADOW

And then we get to, “Working with Shame: From Humiliation to Humility.” And the first sentence sort of says it all: “The most powerful emotional road block for men is shame.” That's just an utterly central and crucial and, in many ways, overwhelming emotion, isn't it?

Robert: It is. And it's astonishing still to me how little attention shame gets in psychotherapy and spiritual practice. It's probably the most-submerged, hidden emotion. And part of the reason for that is that it can mutate very quickly to other states that don't look like shame at all—disassociation, withdrawal, aggression. A lot of men, when they feel shame, move into aggression very quickly—finding fault with the other person; turning the heat back on the other person—because shame itself (pure shame; just sit with it; I don't care how mature we are) is an

uncomfortable thing.

I sit with it. It's kind of squirmy. There's an unusual heat to it. And there's also an urge to just get away from it. But to stay with it is a really lovely practice—just to stay with it and watch it mutate. And it has healthy forms, unhealthy forms.

Unfortunately, a lot of modern press seems to consider it to be just this negative emotion, something we shouldn't have that's in the way of us evolving. I think it's... Without shame we wouldn't have a conscience, remorse. And unfortunately, so much shame, though, is toxic. It's the person himself is being put down. It's like a child being cut to the quick by it, by an insensitive parent, and thinking they are defective; that something's wrong with them and carry that into their adult years.

Ken: Right

Robert: Especially men—when a man hears the words “be a man,” “grow up,” “grow a pair,” “man up.” And we see this in sessions sometimes, where a couple comes in. and the woman is quite well-meaning. But she may say to him, “I wish you were more of a man.” I step in and say, ‘You know what? I understand where you are coming from. You're hurt. You're angry at certain things that he has done. But you're shaming him.’ And I can watch him crumbling and disappearing, or getting defensive. And I'll show her more skillful ways of saying the same thing where she is expressing what she actually feels, and her vulnerability and hurt in that. But most of us men have heard phrases like “be a man” long ago. And we try, dutifully in many cases, to man up, get higher grades, be a better athlete. And it may work in a way, but we are carrying the shame forward. And that shame becomes part of our shadow. We try to become overly-confident, we become overly invested in being prideful. In a way, trying to put ourselves in a position where we are immune to shame. And yet, the real work here is to turn towards

shame. Not easy, I know. It feels... The word mortifying is a very appropriate word for shame.

Ken: Yeah.

Robert: You know. We feel terrible. And sometimes, we should feel terrible. If we really hurt a person we're close to, the shame we feel over that may spur us into saying "I'm sorry," atoning, making amends. But, as I said earlier, unfortunately, so often, all too often, it means that we've crumbled. And we feel like crap. And we are either scrambling to meet the other persons standards that are being set for us, or we are just withdrawing and getting resentful. So to bring it into the open is a very healing thing to do. And I put it in that part of the book, early, because I think it is such an important thing for a man to really understand—his history with shame, how our culture shames, and what it actually is, right down to feeling it as a bare emotion, and getting to the point where you can say to others that are close to them, the simple words, "I'm feeling shame."

Ken: Right. You point out that:

"Shame is the painfully self-conscious sense of our behavior—or self—being exposed as defective, with the immediate result that we are halted in our tracks, for better or for worse. Central to shame is the felt sense of public condemnation, even if our only audience is our inner critic. Shame can be relatively benign and it can also be excruciatingly unpleasant, usually accompanied by an unmistakable loss of face and status, which can be devastatingly emasculating for a man, cutting him down to size in the extreme."

So, you devote a quite long chapter to shame. And so this apparently reflects your seeing it as a really major player in men's lives.

Robert: Every man I've worked with, I am working with shame. Almost all women, too, but the men especially. I want them to know it well, which, in part, means having a far clearer sense of their inner critic, so that when it arises they recognize that's not me. It's like an implant from my history, and I don't have to obey it like a child obeys an authoritarian parent. There is so much to be said about it. And every group I do, every training, shame is not the only topic, but it is a key topic. Once someone has a grasp of that, then they can identify, in any encounter, to what degree is there shame here. Am I feeling shame? It can be very small shame, a little bit of embarrassment, or it can be a major shame over something in our history where we go "Oh, my God, how could I have done that?"

Ken: Right

Robert: And I think when we touch the shame deeply, we also can start to touch the place in us that has compassion, for the "us" that was shamed or had done something shameful. It's all there at the same time. I know when I embrace my shame, when I can be with it, it mutates quite quickly. It opens my heart. It's an unusual thing. Shame actually closes the heart initially. And what I have found, actually then, if you stay with it, it opens the heart, and there's a sense of great care for others that arises from that. Whereas, if I shut it off, I create an isolated me that's over against the rest of life, and is kind of beating himself up rather than facing what needs to be faced.

Ken: Right. A subset of this is the inner critic itself. And so you have a whole section on disempowering your inner critic. You say:

"The central agent of an aggression against ourselves is our inner critic, a cognitive and energetic composite of the main critical/shaming voices we

were subjected to as children. Our inner critic manifests as a heartlessly negative self-appraisal. It is the voice that toxically self-shames. What was done to us by those who most successfully shamed us is what we are now doing to ourselves when we allow our inner critic to have its ‘should’-invested way with us, as though it were the all-knowing adult, and we’re just the child. But the power it has is the power we give it.”

So, the inner critic—another place that’s hiding out.

Robert: Yeah, and it’s such an important step when the inner critic becomes the object of our awareness rather than masquerading as us. That’s a huge step. And so many people have not ever truly faced their inner critic. They’re subjecting themselves to its dictates as if it knows the truth, and they just bow before it. And when we assume a more than childlike position relative to the inner critic, a more adult position, it doesn’t disappear, but it becomes far less central. It kind of goes to the background of our psyche, so to speak. It’s more of a pip-squeak back there, with its little megaphone. I’ve had clients that were actually suicidal because of their inner critic. I’ll put it more accurately. They were suicidal because they were listening to it without question.

And when they realize, “That’s not me. Yeah, it’s an aspect of myself, it’s in my mind” – when they start talking back to it and taking a stand, what a shift. Then they’ve disempowered it. Because the thing is, the inner critic has no real power. It’s what we give to it.

Ken: Right.

Robert: Many aspect of ourselves, for example, are full of tension, unquestionably it can overwhelm us. It can masquerade as us. And the inner critic is just simply internalized toxic shame, and we all have it to varying degrees. Some people

fantasize about getting rid of it. I don't think we get rid of it, we just change how we relate to it.

Ken: Right. Right. And then, related in a very large area, but related to that is what we refer to as the shadow. And so you have a section on bringing your shadow out of the dark; facing what you've disowned in yourself. You say:

“Your shadow is a composite of the elements and qualities within you: that you are disconnected from or are out of touch with; that you are denying, pushing away, or otherwise disowning; that you tend to project on to others (as if they had the particular quality, but you don't); that you are keeping—or trying to keep—out of sight or in the dark; that you describe with the expression, ‘That's not me.’

A person's shadow is not just some archetypal concept, but the very reality that dominates those who are unaware of it... But no matter how pushed away or kept out of site our shadow material may be, it drives much of our behavior—hence the need for shadow work.

Not knowing our shadow keeps us partial, fragmented, stranded from wholeness, stuck in old patterns, regardless of our achievements.”

So, the shadow is really one of the most serious issues in our lives...

Robert: Oh yeah.

Ken: ...with an enormous impact on our thoughts and behavior. And yet, it's amazing how few people realize that they even have shadow.

Robert: The sad thing is that it still hasn't really hit the main stream. That's why I did the book on shadow before I did the book on men. I wanted to get it into the

main stream more. I know you understand it. Well, you've talked about it for a long time. So have I. And I want to introduce it to men. I wrote this book. It's my most mainstream book. I want men to at least have a grasp there's such a thing here, and it's worth knowing. It's worth understanding. It's so central. If you don't work with that zone of yourself, the shadow, you're leaving out way too much. It can color so much of our lives. It can run the show from behind the scenes. And so I'm really hoping that this chapter makes a difference.

Ken: Yeah.

Robert: At least, introducing the topic.

Ken: Right. One of the things that you find as you study shadow is that, one of the major things that we do with it, in order to get it as far away from ourselves as possible, is we project it on to other people. And so, most people are initially surprised to find that many of the things that they loath or hate or despise—or, alternatively, adore, hero-worship, over-exaggerate—are actually aspects of their own psyche that they projected on to these people. And so they are either shadow boxing or shadow hugging their way through life.

Robert: Yeah.

Ken: And it can make a huge difference to realize that you can take those qualities back. Now, of course, it doesn't necessarily mean that the projection, the person you projected on to, doesn't have the quality. But when you take their quality and project your similar quality on to them, then they have twice the amount of it than they normally would. And so, of course, they're completely obnoxious and loathsome in every way possible. But half of that is your own contribution.

Robert: You know, one of my favorite ways of introducing this to a new client,

some people come to our groups, is to work with their dreams. Lots of people here share dreams. It's kind of a curious thing. They may not realize what they're exposing to us when they tell us a dream. But once you start to take it apart a little bit in a skillful way, and have them maybe play out certain parts, they may realize, after a while, "Oh my God! That thing in the dream I was so terrified with..." They'll make the connection between that and their aversion to their anger, for example.

Ken: Right.

Robert: Their anger is part of their shadow, and here it is manifesting as this fearsome carnivore—made all the more scary because of their repression of it. And once they've contacted that, and it can be in a very playful way, there's a sense: "Oh my God. Yes, this is part of me." And they start to realize on their own, "I have pushed this aside, and I pushed it aside because it wasn't safe to get into it when I was a kid," etcetera. And here it is, and here's how it's interfering in my current relationship.

That's one of my favorite doorways into it. Or, when someone comes in and says, "You know, I don't have any anger." [Laughter] "I have no anger," and they're off on a spiritual path. Probe a little bit and, my God, there's so much there. [Laughter] Then I unpack that, slowly but surely.

Ken: We have a quick, and it's just very introductory, but a very quick introduction to shadow that we call "3-2-1 Process." And the idea is that the original shadow started out as your own first-person quality—some aspect or dimension or component of yourself that was then judged negatively or decided was just too uncomfortable or was bad or was wrong. Something like that. So it's pushed away. It's pushed on the other side of self-boundary. And so it actually

appears almost as a second person. It appears as a “thou”—another entity. “It’s not me, but it’s that other entity.” And then I can project it even further into third-person, and then I see it as existing in somebody out there. And I think, “They’re the ones that have all the nasty traits and habits and so on. I myself, of course, don’t have any.” But that’s the general process of the creation of that shadow material. And so, 3-2-1 just reverses the process.

If you are having, for example, a monster in your dream and your emotion is fear, then, you first locate the monster and set it down in the empty chair in front of you, and you talk to it. And so now you have converted from a third-person into a second-person. And you just ask it, “Why are you here? What do you want? What did I do wrong?” Carry the dialogue forward for a while. And then you switch places, and you become the monster. And so then, you answer the person as if you are the monster. “I’m here because I hate your guts. I’m here because I want to kill you. I’m here because I’m furious with you,” etcetera. So now, all of sudden, you’re getting in touch with the actual negative shadow components that you originally projected; that you pushed outside; that you made second-person, and then third-person. And so, to the extent you do that correctly, then you can actually start to inhabit those first-person emotions, feelings, qualities, and so on, and start to feel who they really belong to. And so you can start to re-identify with them, and reclaim them as first-person, and re-own them as first-person. And that can be very, very simple. And it is just the simple introduction. That can be a very, very helpful way.

Robert: It opens the gates.

Ken: Yeah, exactly.

Robert: Then, what we often do when they’re identified with that monster, the part

they pushed aside, take it, look at it more and more deeply emotionally, and connect it to their early history. Often, because they opened to it on their own through their dreams, then they usually go there quite willingly. It's a revelation. And often, there's a lot of joy in realizing the implications of this. "This is something that is me." And then they get a sense of reclaiming it. Of course, when we eliminate everything that is in the shadow, bring it forward, we just become more and more whole. And I think men need to really, especially appreciate that understanding of shadow. There's cultural shadow. There's so many layers and levels to it. I could have left it out of the book, but thought I'd really like to write a chapter on it.

Ken: Yeah. Well, and for men also, one of the things, of course, that helps—and I'm sure you have realized this—is that when we're working with shadow, we're working with energies. So to take back and re-own the shadow is actually to re-own energy. It's to re-own the source of power. So you're actually increasing your power—hopefully power “with,” not power “over.” But, none the less, the actual energetic store, your gas tank is getting fuller and fuller. And so that becomes an incredibly important addition to your overall capacities, and your overall strengths, and your overall power. Whereas, as soon as you cut it off, deny it, and project it, you've cut off and denied the power and the energy connected with it, as well.

Robert: And, it also takes energy to repress something, to keep it in the shadow. That can actually be quite depressing. It's takes a lot of juice to keep some of the stronger emotions at bay.

Ken: Yeah, it does. Exactly.

PART 3: STEPPING UP TO CHALLENGE

And then you go into an important issue about challenge, and why challenge would

be important for masculinity. And, again, in this sort of era of not-really-sure about what masculine is or isn't, then for a male to know whether he is supposed to be getting into challenges, or whether he's supposed to not be getting into challenges, can become a confusing issue. But you point out that, it really is a way that men can ride their edge of potential and actually awaken the capacities in themselves that are going to help them grow, and develop, and become fuller men, in any definition of the term. So you say:

“Challenge calls out the warrior in a man, the one who tests, hones, and refines himself through his encounter with difficult or unusual conditions... As uncomfortable as challenge may be for a man, it can also be enlivening and deepening, presenting him with an edge that can bring out the very best in him... Challenge is the part of our path that can most overtly build multidimensional muscle and strongly embodied presence, deepening our capacity to see, hear, feel, know and act. It calls us to leave our comfort zone and venture forth into territories that may be far from familiar... Challenge can take many forms...but its call to be met *and* how it is met are fundamental aspects of manhood.”

So, talk a little bit about how that challenge is foundational to manhood.

Robert: I think we feel that challenge early on as young boys, just our sense of wanting to keep an eye on the parental support we have, but also to venture forth, to risk. I think males develop beautifully when there is sufficient risk in their lives, not too much risk, but there's enough challenge that brings out, as I've said, the warrior in one, the one who is truly brave.

Ken: Right.

Robert: If we lack enough challenge, we kind of stagnate. We can get too

comfortable on the couch. Too much challenge, of course, can overwhelm us and cause us to rebound. But I've found in my life, that edge is to where I've grown more profoundly. I haven't gone to it always willingly, usually not willingly at all, but there it is. And it has often brought forth qualities in me I didn't even know I had or only partially suspected I had. Without that challenge, I wouldn't know myself as well.

And challenge isn't always this hard thing. One of my biggest challenges and most growthful is being with my wife Diane. She's very soft, loving. We are very close. There's a challenge to be fully present, to be transparent, and this goes on and on. She can see me so clearly. I appreciate that more and more and more. The challenge is to always to meet that, and that calls forth something in me, too, that I might otherwise have been a little lazy about accessing.

Ken: Correct.

Robert: So that I think the edge is... We don't want to take foolhardy risks. But I think that things that are not without enough risk in our lives, we stagnate. And the risk sometimes is to just keep going—keep meditation practice going, keep working out, handle our aging as skillfully as possible.

Ken: Right. You say:

“The rest of my preadolescent years included many fights, more than a hundred each year. The aggression in the schoolyards and surrounding fields was intense, and I mostly felt right at home in it. Indoors, I was ultracompetitive, snaring the highest grades with relentless consistency, exulting in being the best, year after year, even though I remained quite shy, and my goal of getting my father's approval never came about. Once I was outside though, academics didn't matter; all that counted was physical

prowess, especially in fighting.”

Now, traditionally, this would be considered a pretty manly start in life.

Robert: Yeah.

Ken: And it seems fairly deep-seated and really rooted, in a sort of condensed fashion. How did you get so thoroughly out of that original start?

Robert: Well, the original start was that I was shamed very, very heavily, and violently, by my father when I was young. And, of course, I crumbled under that. But also, there was a lot of fight in me. So I over-compensated gigantically by trying to be the very best at school, in every way. And I did, but I wasn't happy in that. My shame became aggression. I exemplified that. And still, my shame and shyness deflated me. My pride and aggression inflated me. And most people saw me as this person always getting the highest grades. I did really well athletically.

And I had all those fights as a young boy, which I didn't seek actually. That's what's interesting. I remember being pursued by two bullies when I was in grade two. I was only 6 or 7 years-old. And they chased me for half a mile, usually throwing rocks at me. And I was scared. I ran and ran. It was probably the start of my track career. I just ran!

One day, they caught me. It's so vivid to me. They were on me, fists pounding. I was really scared. I fought back—all the adrenaline. And to my shock, I defeated both of them. I got them both in some sort of hold that where their arms were going to break, something like that, and they left me alone after that. But I continued the fights. The school I was in, every recess, lunch hour, there were rock fights, fights. I was being challenged all the time. And I had learned the art of submitting other boys. I'd choke them out. I'd arm-hold them. I don't know where

I got that from, but I had it. But I could not hit them in the face. It would have been more efficient just to sock them in the face and it would be over. I didn't do that. And this felt normal to me—go to school: recess a fight, lunch-hour a fight. And it just went on, and on, and on, till I hit my teens. It stopped, except for the story I tell in the book about fighting the neighborhood bully. But I carried that into my adult years. It hardened me. It hardened me to be that athletically and academically high.

Ken: Right.

Robert: I was basically Fort Robert. And, you know, I hit my twenties, and I was in a very, very painful relationship that ended disastrously, and I broke down. I hadn't cried since I was probably a young boy, and I just broke. And I found my way to therapy and groups, reluctantly. I did not want to go. I just thought, 'no way I am going,' but I had to go, I was so broken. And I started to soften, and I started to feel the benefits of actually getting vulnerable, letting the tears flow. I started to feel people more. My empathy, which had been shut down, opened. There was more to go. But the process started with me being in such pain, I could not hold it together. I could not battle my way out of it. I couldn't get straight A's to get out of it. It didn't matter what my credentials were. I had to crack. And I did.

Ken: Wow. Wow. But, eventually, you grew out of that.

Robert: Yeah. It was a long journey. I thought I had grown out of it faster than I had. So I had times where I thought, 'I don't need any more therapy.' But life taught me the hard way that I had not completed my task. I still was being driven by that internalized shame, though less and less. I knew it more, but not enough. I didn't really understand my shame really well until I was in my late 40s or early 50s, where I really, really understood it. And I look back and I go, 'Wow!' I spent

so much of my life without very much empathy, except when I was doing my therapeutic work. And I didn't even understand that that was going on, or the shame I had, or the fact that I confused anger and aggression. I mean, I hurt many people through that. I didn't intend to, but my actions caused that. My unresolved wounds were not worked through fully. And in my arrogance at a certain age I said, 'Well, I worked all this through. I'm free of it. I'll teach others about it.' And man, did I need to get humbled.

Ken: Yeah.

Robert: And life did that.

Ken: Yeah. Well, in a sense, that's a hopeful story for people who are 20s and 30s: Don't worry that things don't seem to be going well now. They can get better even into 50 and 60.

Robert: Yeah. And I meet so many people who have done 30 years of therapy, lots of spiritual work, very mature people who are saying, "God, I've done all this work. How come I...?" And I'll say, 'Well, there's a deeper layer. You haven't got to the very bottom of your core wounding.' Which is something like, you know, feeling rejected by life. Whatever it is, once you're down at that core place you encounter your deep helplessness, your fear, kind of an existential terror at times. But coming through the other side is such a wondrously sobering thing, such a joy, to have really gotten to the bottom of what's been driving you to behave in less than healthy ways as an adult.

Ken: Right. Yep. That's one of the great, great benefits of being on any sort of path that is working with your deeper potentials and encouraging you to work with them, and unfold them, and realize them, and bring them into existence. It is true. An enormous joy and joie de vivre and happiness and satisfaction.

Robert: It is something so simple. Like: turn toward the pain. Turn toward the painful stuff, and understand clearly what spiritual bypassing is, what these other things are that we can use to distract ourselves from it. And just turn toward it, one conscious step at a time, passionately moving forward. It's counterintuitive at first. But the rewards, as you were saying, some of the rewards are so immense, going toward that difficult, messy stuff. And of course, that means, in part, going into our shadow lands.

Ken: Yep.

Robert: And at a certain age, I think, especially: What else is there to do? Why go to your grave, so to speak, without having investigated yourself, and what you call yourself, as fully as possible?

Ken: Right. Right. Going on with power, you point out that there are at least four different types of power. There are "power-over," "power-under," "power-to," and "power-with":

"Power-over is all about dominating or controlling another or others, and is the key operational preference of unhealthy manhood, along with *power-under* (meaning feeling a certain status or safety in submissively aligning with more dominate or privileged males).

Then there is power-to:

"Power-to is a healthier approach in relationship, and is shared undertaking that may not be particularly intimate, but makes for a more respectful mutuality, with the prevailing image being not of opposition, but one of side by side partnership."

Then we have power-with:

“*Power-with* is the most life-giving form of power... Here, power is an ally, with partners solidly behind each other, rooted in mutual trust. Their shared power deepens their love, and their shared love deepens the power.

“True masculine power is full blooded *power-with*... It brings out the very best in a man, backing him in taking needed stands, without forgetting his heart.”

So, how hard is it for men to move from power-over to power-under? I know, for a lot of them, it's kind of a stretch because power equals dominating people. And if you can't dominate somebody, you know, what's the point? It would be like hunting, where you do hunting shared. You share with a hunting, and share with the prey. No, you shoot the prey, not share with the prey. So, how hard is it to get most men from a power-over to a power-with? From the time they first time come into your office, to the time that they start to get it?

Robert: In some ways, it's quite difficult. But more often than not, it's not that difficult, especially when they're invested. They want their relationship to improve. They feel a riff they have with one of their children. Things at work aren't going so well. When they realize that things are not working in their life because of this, we can look at the shame that's causing them to seek power-over and that inflation it gives them; that sense of removal from their shame and their more tender vulnerable places.

Ken: Right.

Robert: It's not usually that difficult. Saying with people who are invested in power-under, where they are getting their sense of security from submitting to another, shared power can be lovely thing. It doesn't always mean it's always shared 50/50, but there is a sense they are on the same team. And if two people

who are in a relationship where they are sharing power, they're sharing power, they've gone beyond power struggles, then, when there is a lot of intensity, there's some hassle, it's almost as if they are both sitting on the couch gazing with mutual compassion upon the neuroses that are being addressed in either partner. There's a sense of it being we-centered—not in a passive way, but in a way that leads to expansion, and may even bring in some of what I call being-centered relationship, where there's a sense of such openness and such permission to let everything that arises in the relationship be grist for the mill; work that can be done together.

PART 4: HARNESSING YOUR ANGER

Ken: You move on into anger, which is one of the most confused, completely misunderstood, nightmare of topics to get into. It has to be done, of course, simply because it's so poorly, poorly understood. But we can start by pointing out that you say:

“Anger is a heatedly aroused state that combines (1) the gripping sense of being wrong or thwarted and (2) a compelling pull to take care of this... Anger can be a tremendously beneficial force, a fieriness that provides both heat and light, helping establish—to take but one example—healthy boundaries. Just because it's easy to abuse our anger (letting it, for example, turn into ill will and violence) does not mean it's a negative or unwholesome emotion.”

But, boy, it gets a bad rap, doesn't it?

Robert: It gets real bad press. It's really easy to trash anger because, so often, the way people use it, it is abusive, does do great damage. But that's not anger's fault.

It's the fault of how we use it. We have a choice. If I'm angry at you, I could convert it into hostility, sarcasm, ill will, get really aggressive and attacking. Or, it can be just as heated, but have some heart in it. And you're far more likely to hear, it if I do that. So anger itself is not the problem. The problem is what we do with it.

Ken: Right. You've talked about this in previous books, as well. I remember your going through a little bit of a wrist-slapping of the spiritual traditions for simply looking at anger across the board, in every way, as being an utter, absolute, horrifying, defiling emotion or sin, or something.

Robert: Yes.

Ken: And I have to agree with that. From the very beginning of my study of this field, one thing that I just dramatically disagreed with was the way spirituality handled anger. It just seemed guaranteed to disown it, repress it, judge it, make it worse, and so on. But it just keeps on, doesn't it?

Robert: Yeah. In Buddhist source texts, I found that the same word was being used to translate anger, ill will, hatred. I thought, 'Okay, there's a problem here.' And when I saw people on various spiritual paths who have been taught anger's a "no-no," well, of course, where did it go? It went into their shadow.

Ken: Yeah.

Robert: And they were determined not to let it come out, but, of course, it would leak out. It always leaks out somewhere. And what a relief when they realized this is actually not a negative state. It's not unwholesome. It just simply has been kept in the cage so long that when you do let it out, like an animal that's kept too long in the cage, it behaves really badly. But anger is not the problem. I mean, you and I know that as people mature, it doesn't go away. It becomes more refined, perhaps.

It becomes more what I would call ‘wrathful compassion.’ It’s kind of a sacred fire. It’s there, and it can be an awakening for us. And my anger is simply still with me, but it is more refined now. I’ve learned to use it far more skillfully.

Ken: Right. The Tibetan Buddhists have a notion that the defiled emotions, when entered with non-dual awareness, actually have at their core a transcendental wisdom—because everything, at its core, has Buddha Nature. So, push into anything and you are going to find Spirit. But the five main defiling emotions of ignorance, and anger, and jealousy, and envy and so on [various iterations of the “five poisons”: ignorance, attachment, aversion, pride, and jealousy], when you push into anger, the corresponding transcendental wisdom is clarity. And that’s not bad for what it’s actually holding, for what it actually can yield, what you can actually get out of it if you approach it in a correct way. And I thought, at the very least, for a spiritual tradition, to even give it that, was pretty laudable.

Robert: Yeah. Yeah. The interesting thing when I hear that is that, for me, anger is moral fire.

Ken: Yeah.

Robert: But fire is heat and light. And most of us only relate to fire, in the anger context, as heat. But there’s light. What you’re pointing to is the light of anger. Instead of causing more confusion, fully expressed anger that’s done with heart actually illuminates, as well as it kind of heats things up. And anger can be that, but it can’t be that until we become intimate with it. And here we are going full circle: you have to move toward your anger. Someone can get angry a lot and not have any clue what their anger is about. But to investigate it is a wonderful thing. And we all have anger. And the question is: What are we doing with it?

Ken: Right. And in this part of the overall program that you're recommending, of course, for this journey towards a more authentic manhood, you say:

“Anger is central to self-protection, to guarding our boundaries...to standing our ground in the face of injurious or potentially injurious forces. Those who are cut off from their own anger almost invariably have weak or overly porous boundaries, and cave in all too easily in circumstances that require them to take a strong stand.

There is a raw intensity in anger that's central to masculinity, manifesting as a full-blooded muscularity of intention that roots our legs and expands our chests and increases the blood flow to our arms, providing us with an on-tap fierceness that helps underlie that we view as needing to be done.”

And the whole idea about anger as protecting what needs to be protected, it's sometimes also viewed as the energy that breaks down obstacles and, so, opens up any road blocks that are slowing you down. I sometimes think of anger as the T-cells of the psychological immune system. As soon as something that doesn't belong in you gets pushed in you, you react appropriately. And so if that's some other person shoving stuff at you that, you know, is inappropriate, or some idea that enters you, gets interjected, that isn't right, anger is there to say, “Fuck you!” and throw it out.

Robert: It must be a strong “no” that's unequivocal. It's strong and it means “no.” And you know, in this context, fierce compassion is not an oxymoron anymore. I mean, you can be compassionate and pretty angry at the same time. It takes a lot of practice to get really good at it, but we all have the potential to do that, at least to some degree—to do what I call ‘heart anger.’

Ken: Yeah. Well if you can do tough love, you can do heart anger.

Robert: Yep. Yep.

Ken: You continue:

“We need our anger in order to move forward, to level what no longer serves us, to potential address injustice, to protect the sanctity of our being—and this will backfire if our anger gets funneled into aggression or is treated as something negative or unwholesome or in the way of true peace... In the face of injustice, be it personal or collective, anger rouses us to take action—its heat is activist. Anger is not just fire but *moral fire*, its nature being to protect what is weak or vulnerable or broken in us. Anger catalyzes us into taking as fiercely necessary stands to guard what needs guarding, including the sanctity of our being.

“An essential piece of work for men is to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy anger, learning to constantly choose the former. Without developing the capacity for the healthy expression of anger, a man will simply stunt his growth, continuing to attach himself to the kind of power dynamic that does no one any real good and letting his anger funnel into hostility, mean-spiritedness, and violence, however indirectly. Part of the good news is that working deeply with your anger brings out the kind of warriorhood in you that’s so badly needed in our world: powerful, gutsy, and heartfelt, protective of what truly needs protecting, able to deliver anger without getting lost in it and turning it into aggression.”

So, that’s a pretty good summary. Sounds like a force that we need on our side.

Robert: I think so. Again and again, I see people exalting, those who have been out of touch with anger exalting, when they actually cut loose in our therapy chambers. And it doesn’t just mean they get loud and fiery. Often, there’s a lot of

joy. There's tears, too. But there's the sense of, "I'm alive!! I'm fully alive! And I get to have this. And I'm not going to destroy the world just because I'm angry. I'm probably going to take better care of it because I'm angry."

Ken: Yeah.

Robert: And learning how to not slip into unhealthy anger... Unhealthy anger shames. It blames. It gets aggressive. It attacks. It doesn't give a damn about the other person's well-being. And we all can slip in that area really easily. At the same time, there's a choice. There is such a choice. When we learn about anger, there are so many ways to deliver it, including just sitting with it, being present with it.

Ken: Yeah. Indeed.

PART 5: OVERCOME YOUR AGGRESSION

Ken: And then we get to the, in a sense, unhealthy aspects of anger, or something certainly very close to that. And that's aggression. So, as you call this particular chapter, "Aggression Unveiled: When You Shift into Attack Mode":

"Is there any quality more commonly associated with masculinity than aggression? When we hear admonitions to 'be a man' or 'man up'" or 'grow a pair,' we are usually hearing a call to be aggressive, or to be more aggressive."

So, how did that get started? It's so deep-seated. It seems so evolutionary old. How did we get stuck with something like this?

Robert: Aggression goes back a long, long way. It just comes of being here, as a being. Humans, we have the capacity for self-reflection. So the aggression that we grow into as toddlers, as little kids, can, if it's handled skillfully, start to become anger. I think a lot of our work is to convert our aggression, and, of course, by aggression I mean attack, to convert that back into anger. So if we are really pissed off or hurt, we express it. But we're not out to get the other.

Ken: Right.

Robert: At the same time, that place in us that wants to get the other is still there. We all have the capacity for aggression and violence (discussed in the next chapter, "Aggression as Instinct"). And to know our anger really well helps us immensely in dealing with aggression and violence. There's so much to be said for evolving from simply being aggressive, when the emotion of anger arises, to being purely angry—to not needing to attack the other, put them down, hurt them, shame them, blame them. But without any practice, without any training, most of us, most of our anger is just aggression, or out to score points, to win, to defend ourselves, to be right.

When I watch a couple going back and forth in a couple's session, they'll be aggressive. I'll let it go on for a minute or two. There's no true want in either part for resolution. They just want to be right. When we get down below the sense of being right, past the disagreement to where they are emotionally, and we teach them how to connect emotionally, they can still maintain the disagreement, but it doesn't have as much weight because now there is a resonance. They know the other person's feeling state and they are staying in touch with that. It's so easy to leave that and get into, simply, the intellectual verbal aggression that is so common these days, so common.

Ken: Right. Right. So now we move into the many faces of aggression. And here you talk about them carefully, but, essentially, just a long list of the many different faces, different forms of aggression that we have. And it's a long list, but I am just going to read them to give people an indication of what we are talking about: hostility; sarcasm; ill will; contempt; passive aggression; heartless criticism; violence; defensiveness; harshness; mean-spirited or shame infused-teasing; excessive competitiveness; intimidation; hatred.

And then after that, you give a list of antidotes to aggression, and you also discuss these. But I'll just read the list to give an indication: empathy; compassion—and these again, are antidotes to aggression—vulnerability; cultivating intimacy with your shame, fear and anger; sympathetic joy; no name-calling; skillful anger.

So, with regard to the many forms of aggression that we just listed previously, how do you use these antidotes to offset aggression?

Robert: By practicing them, by understanding them. Even if the practice feels kind of intellectual at first, light weight, shallow: practicing them. Bringing some degree of compassion into your state when you already feel angry, irritated, frustrated by another; to do what it takes to just remember that this is a human being; to have some compassion or even to remember that compassion is appropriate here. Then, if you start to get sarcastic, it's very hard to continue. Because once you slip into sarcasm, you're on the attack. You can be smiling. It can be very sweet. But it's sarcasm. When compassion comes in, sarcasm doesn't last very long. You simply may still be angry. You see the other person. And you can feel the urge to dehumanize them, and also the other urge, the countering urge, to not do so.

So it takes practice. Because the states you read about earlier, the list—hostility, contempt, etc.—very easy to slip into those; very easy in the heat of battle to get contemptuous, to get sarcastic, mean-spirited. It's so easy to do, for any of us.

Ken: Yeah. And so, almost any of the antidotes help interrupt almost any of the forms of aggression?

Robert: Here's just a caveat. Here's the ideal thing. If you say, "Ah! Sarcasm," or "I'm being sarcastic," or "Oh my God, I am treating you contemptuously," we blow the whistle on ourselves. We can name what we're doing. Then that makes room for the other states like compassion and sympathetic joy, or whatever, to come in and make a difference. The first step is, "Aha!" Like for example, right in the middle of being sarcastic, if you were to say, "Oh! I'm being sarcastic," that puts a halt to things. It's hard to continue once you've said that. It's the same with reactivity. Once we admit that we're reactive and put a period at the end of the sentence and shut up, we can shift the destructive course that we're in with another, very quickly.

Ken: Right, right. We can move on now to sort of the end limit, the ultimate expression of aggression, which is violence. And you refer to violence as "the brass knuckles of aggression." So, you say:

"In violence, we don't just consider injuring others but also give the green light to doing so, often with a forcefulness as unrestrained as it is self-justified. Vengeance, blood lust, severe dehumanization, rape, torture, acting with extreme prejudice—whatever its form, violence is aggression with no restraints, further fueled by a mindset that adds an emphatic, not-to-be-debated stamp of approval."

So violence is at the very end of aggression and, of course, violence is indeed what

tends to make the world the very dicey place it is.

Robert: Yes. And in the same time you all have to recognize that we all have that capacity. Under certain conditions, I think any of us could become violent. It's just a matter of, do we take it further than it needs to go, or do we just do what's necessary and what I call virtuous violence. So, it's there. And there certainly is an abundance of it in our world right now, justified to the hilt. It's just too bad. It's there and it's not going away just because we think it shouldn't be there or it's not very spiritual. It's there. And the more we know in ourselves, the more we can become a positive force for reducing it in the world. But that requires a really deep journey into one's self. To feel the place in us where we could injure others, be violent, it's not just an easy thing to admit when you really feel it. There a sense: "My god, I could actually do that. I could actually do that. If someone was trying to hurt my child badly, this is what I would do." The Dalai Lama, himself, mentioned virtuous violence some years ago, as a possible course of action. So it's the darkest of the dark-side-ness. And yet, if it's investigated properly and brought into the open, I think it mutates from violence back into anger, back into, maybe, hurt. It doesn't have to stay as that. But to journey toward that is a big thing, a big thing.

Ken: You continue:

"Violence is not just learned behavior; for better or worse, it is innate to us. Toddler hostility is common—and usually harmless only because toddlers are far from adept handlers of weaponry, other than perhaps their teeth—way past the point of being just learned behavior. The potential for such bare aggression, so quick to arise and so quick to attack, is wired into us. After just two months in the womb, the male fetal brain is flooded with testosterone,

which shrinks the communication centers and hearing cortex, and doubles the size of the part of the brain that processes sexual matters.”

I used to jokingly say that testosterone has only two drives: fuck it or kill it. But that’s not far from wrong, is it?

Robert: No, there’s some truth to that. But, boy, that’s... I heard a joke once of a young girl saying, “I just love boys, until they reach the point where they have testosterone poisoning.” [Laughter] And I know I had one period in my life where I had no testosterone. I had prostate cancer, and I was doing some medication that just caused me lose all testosterone for about three or four months. But what a revelation to be in a position where I did not have any of that in my system. I felt kind of flabby, flaccid in so many ways, on many, many levels. I didn’t like it, but it also gave me more understanding of what it is like for women, being around men who have a lot of testosterone running through their system. And of course, I got it back. And I have enough back now to function properly. But it was quite a revelation to be in a position without any of it in my system.

Ken: Yeah, yeah. Whenever you get a really strong type of role reversal like that, it can be really telling. And I think very, very few men have a sense of how unsafe a feeling it is, being a woman. We tend to think that way a little bit. Men feel unsafe around stronger men. And certainly in school days, there’s always the bully and guys are always afraid of him, and so on. But with girls, almost any male can be a bully just because of the average upper body strength. And so to be exposed to something like that constantly can’t be an easy situation to be in.

Robert: No. And the thing that’s interesting is, a lot of men think that by shutting off their raw power and their anger they become safer for women. They’re kind of soft. They’re understanding and empathetic. But I found that women feel safest

with men who are in touch with their power and their softness and tenderness at the same time. And there's a sense that that man can stand up for me. He can protect me. He also can open up when he needs to get vulnerable with me. He's not just an icon of rock-hard masculinity. He's embraced something that makes me feel safe with him, but he's not a push-over, at all.

Ken: And I had a sister-in-law who at least felt the safe part, because of the power. I don't think she felt the soft part from this guy. But, people in the family had a little bit of trouble with him. And I asked her why she was seeing him. First of all, she was a brilliant lawyer at Irell & Manella, which is like the second-largest law firm in LA. And she said, when I asked her, "Why were you going out with this guy?" she said, "I feel really safe around him." I thought that was really interesting. So I talked to the guy. I knew what he did. He was a bounty hunter in South Africa. So I said, 'Why did you become a bounty hunter.' And he said, "Oh, it's one of the few places you can kill people and not have to worry about it." And I went, oh my god, no wonder she felt safe with somebody like that.

Robert: Unless the point came where she began to displease him. That's a slippery slope.

Ken: Yeah. I mean, she could end up "offed" quite easily. But it didn't turn out, it didn't last, anyway.

Robert: I think a lot of women who've had abusive backgrounds and haven't dealt with it fully will often choose a partner who's very shut down. He's lost his masculine core. He's safe because he's not even close to ever getting violent, which could create a lot of security and safety. But it could also make him a little boring after a while, especially to the woman who begins to work on herself and claim her own power, and get her anger back. Then she wants him to open up. But,

of course, that's very challenging for him, because he was with her in the first place because she was attracted to him for not having those sort of emotions on tap.

Ken: Right. Yep.

“Steps to Working with Your Capacity for Violence.” And this is an important section of the book, as well. Well, they're all important. But, I'll mention just a few points here.

“The first step is to recognize and acknowledge its presence.”

“The second step is to move toward it. This means bringing more awareness to it, getting close enough to it through such focused attentiveness to see its details, its intentions, its history, its ways of showing up in your life.”

“The third step is to bring it out of the dark. This doesn't mean unleashing it or letting it run wild, but illuminating it and, slowly but surely, bringing it into the open without, however, taking on its viewpoint and/or acting it out.”

“The fourth step is to not let it out of our sight... We need to sense its arising—its shift out of latency—as close as possible to its inception; it's far easier to deal with it then than when it is full-blown.”

So, what's the overall goal here, given its inherent existence in our being? Where do we want aggression to end up?

Robert: The goal is to become truly intimate with it, with our capacity for it, so we know it well—we can sense its arising way before it becomes full-blown. I mean, intimate with something means we get very close to it, but we need just enough distance to keep a lucid focus. So I think that's the thing. We want to know this

place in ourselves. We don't want our violence shoved and sat in the back corner of our shadow as if it doesn't exist. We want to know it. And certainly not act it out unless extreme conditions require it, but to know it as well as we can.

Ken: Right.

PART 6: RELATIONAL INTIMACY AND THE HEART OF HEROISM

Ken: Moving on to another topic of the several topics that you address for manhood, certainly a central one, and this is the notion of the hero. You say:

“The most striking and enduring figure embedded in men’s consciousness is the hero. The bravest of the brave, the ultimate performer, the one who sacrifices himself for the greater good, the one who perseveres no matter how daunting the challenge—such are some of the many faces of the hero... a beacon of quintessential manliness, anchored in unflinching courage. An essential part of a man’s self-work is exploring his relationship to whatever constitutes his sense of heroism...”

So, exploring heroism—another important task for this ongoing project.

Robert: Because we all carry that in us—some sense of what is most noble in us. And if we simply project it on others, it doesn't serve us. And that's just what most men do. But if we can start to feel that in ourselves (and again, we go back to an earlier chapter, “The Gift of Challenge: An Edge That Can Bring Out Your Best”), that brings out the hero in us—the one who perseveres, no matter what the conditions are. Of course, in reality, the hero is going to stumble and fall. But there's still that sense of inner nobility, something in us that really, really stands for what's truly best in us and in life. And it may be hidden a lot. It may be

subjugated. But it's still there. And I think it's worth exploring our history with that and knowing what we consider to be heroic, now.

Ken: Right. So, you make a couple of strong claims here. You state that, "Courage is perhaps the central attribute of the hero." And, of course, the hero is one of the central attributes of manhood.

"Andreia, the ancient Greek word for courage, carries the literal meaning of 'being manly'... Courage is all about facing what we're scared to do, and doing it nonetheless... Courage is not fearlessness, but a resolute refusal to be paralyzed by fear, a deliberate turning and moving toward the dragon, step by conscious step, an activation of our will to persist in difficult conditions. It is the very heart of heroism."

And heroism is the heart of being a man. So, where in our culture, today, can a man be a hero?

Robert: I think in all kinds of ways. We can look at the more glamorous ways of being a hero, of doing things that seemingly make a big difference in the world. But I think there's an everyday heroism. Someone who's just getting out of bed and going to work is heroic, for some. It depends on how close to an edge it is. And the thing is, if it's not scary, there's no courage. Courage means I'm scared and I'm going to persist. I'm having the heart to go ahead. I'm accessing that place in me that may be trembling, shaking in my boots, but I'm still moving forward. It's a very noble virtue, in men or women, to access that. And, again, certain conditions can bring that forth. If we're just sitting around and there's not much challenge in our lives, there's not much reason for courage to surface. It doesn't take much courage to go grab another beer. But, there's certain tasks we all have to do. We know in our heart of hearts what those tasks are. And when we move

toward them, there's usually some fear. What could go wrong? Etcetera. Whatever it is. And that causes the rise of courage. There's a sense of moving forward. And the more we do it, the fear decreases and we're just then caught up in pure action. We're taking action for the greater good.

Ken: Right.

“Taking pride in what we (and others) have done can be a beautiful part of honoring ourselves and others... You've just had a major success at work, and you're not being modest about it, but allowing yourself to be openly proud of what you've achieved, without indulging in any sense of superiority over your coworkers.

Pride can also be a far less honorable state, rooted in arrogance and a sense of superiority, existing mostly as an antidote or solution to shame, exalting itself through diminishing or disrespecting others. To be caught up in this kind of pride aligns us with narcissistic heroism, featuring a blown-up version of 'me' at the helm, a massively myopic individualism.

Taking pride in something that we've accomplished (the bare pleasure of obvious competency!) doesn't have to be an occasion of egocentric engorgement, but can simply be an exultantly contagious acknowledgement, a vitally visible 'yes' that's being shared for the sheer joy of it.”

So, how can we spot the difference between these two versions of pride?

Robert: Well, I think when we're caught up in the narcissistic type of pride, we're overly inflated. And if we're observed closely, it would be seen that there's just not much compassion, that we're just so much 'me.'

Ken: So that's the Christian “deadly sin?”

Robert: Yeah, the deadly sin. I think in the healthier pride there's a sense of sharing it with others. There's a sense of not being inflated. There's a certain expansion, but it's a healthy expansion, but it's not like a sense of being puffed up. I think so much pride, healthy pride, can tend to be treated badly, too. But if you or I do really well at something, I think it's natural to feel a certain exaltation, a certain sense of celebration. And it's not necessarily egocentric, but it is like, "Wow! Look what I did!" And I think it's contagious when it's like that. When it's the unhealthy version, it's not very contagious. It's a little bit repulsive.

Ken: In terms of heroism, this is an interesting progression:

“[The hero] is usually armed, or has special powers. He morphs from the good guy par excellence of early childhood to the deliverer of righteous violence of late childhood and early adolescence, to the more-blood-the-better death-deliverer of adolescence, to the ruthlessly efficient über-achiever of late adolescence and so-called adulthood, usually as quick with witticisms and cool asides as he is with lethal power.”

Why do those versions get nastier and nastier with more growth?

Robert: Well, testosterone levels increase for starters. I think that's huge. Take a ten year-old boy. Here's a video game. Here's all the blood and the gore. There's a sense of "wow" in it, and super-involvement, where a little boy doesn't tend to do that. His heroes are more benign.

Ken: Okay. [Laughter] Fuck it or kill it!

Robert: Yep, yep. And that reaches a peak at a certain age.

Ken: Right. Okay. Then we reach into Part III, which is "Relational Intimacy." And this, of course, is an area that a lot of men have a lot of trouble with, or at least

they notice it more. Many of the other areas are something that just applies to their own interior, so to speak, as so they can hide that from the public or don't have to rate it or anything like that. But relational intimacy is done with at least one other person, so that at least one other person knows what's going on. And so, this can be a particularly challenging component. You say:

“Not every man needs to go into conscious intimate relationship—for some may find sufficient evolution and fulfillment in other domains—but, for the sake of one and all, every man needs to wholeheartedly engage in the learnings and work that make such relational closeness possible.”

So we then move into, “Clearing the Relationship Hurdle: Some Preparatory Considerations”:

“Many men feel at a loss when it comes to intimate relationship. And plenty of men live as though there's not much they can do about this; even when they know better, they tend to settle for much less than they could have.”

What do you say to such a man?

Robert: I say to him that there's so much more you could have. And here's how to begin. And I may give him a taste of it through certain practices I can do with him, certain ways of working with his body and his emotions—give him just a taste of what it's like to feel closer, where his heart's more involved; he's flowing back and forth with her with more emotional resonance. And just to taste that can be so liberating.

A lot of men in that position only found a deeper connection with a female partner during sex. And sex went fairly well. But that's the only place that they can find it. And poor old sex gets burdened with being the place to go to for that, and we over-

rely on it.

So, I think when men really get past the shame, work with the shame of not being enough for a partner (that can be crippling), and have the humility to say, “You know, I’ve certainly succeeded in the world in many ways, but in this one area (for example: emotional literacy) I’m a beginner. I need to learn.” Then Diane will start to teach them something about that and give them readings. Because, usually, the woman has more emotional literacy, even though there may be problems with how she’s dealing with her emotions and psychological states, too. But still, there that sense of being a man, and a lot of men are emotionally illiterate. They don’t know what they’re feeling when they feel them. They’re ashamed to admit that. So, when the shame itself (that’s the initial emotion) is explored, dealt with, then the other emotions—anger, fear, sadness, joy—can all be brought into the mix, discussed. All of them can be brought in.

So it’s an educational process. And it’s a stretch. You’re back to challenge and an edge. Stretching hurts. It also can feel damn good as you expand to include more. So, the invitation to such a man is, there’s a way to expand into this, to feel into this. It’s not always easy. But, the good news: it’s doable.

Ken: Well that is good news. Among the several skills that you talk about here, one is called “deep listening.” And a lot of men think that they know how to listen. They just sort of sit and nod, and that’s listening. But you point out that it’s actually a lot deeper than that. You say:

“Though listening may seem like a passive activity, it can actually be quite dynamic, requiring both alertness and ease. It is vital receptivity in action, taking in not just the speakers’ words, but also their emotional state, their body language, their quality of presence.”

And so, this deep listening requires:

- being wholly attentive to the other, without losing touch with yourself;
- being empathically connected to the other, without and loss or weakening of your boundaries;
- being patient with the other, but not passively;
- being present and consciously embodied (aware of your sensations, breathing, posture, intentions, energy level), no matter what you're feeling or thinking;
- being genuinely interested in the other, beyond what they're saying;
- being able to make compassionate room for difficult states in the other; and
- being able to listen to yourself as you listen to the other.”

So, deep listening is another tool. Do you tend to help individuals working on this by going over that one step at a time?

Robert: Initially, I teach it experientially without even bringing the list in, because each person is different. And once we're past a certain point, then we'll start to look at things that are on the list. I like them to have an experiential sense, though, first. And then they kind of get what it's like to really listen—not just to be able to repeat back what the other person says, but to notice what they're feeling as they listen; how active the mind is; what they're doing with their breathing; and what clues they're picking up from the other person as the other person speaks to them. It's something we should have learned a long time ago. And, it also can be learned quite quickly.

When we're truly interested in the other person, we tend to slip into a lot of the

qualities of deep listening, automatically. But when we're not that interested, then it's more difficult. And a lot of men, I've found, aren't that interested in the inner workings of their partner until they've done some deep work on becoming more attuned to their inner workings.

Ken: Right.

Robert: They start to listen to themselves more. They notice how my breath shifted here when she said that, what emotion kicked in. Or, when her head tilted a little bit, what happened to me? It's like attuning finer and finer. The focus gets very fine. There's also, to varying degrees, a panoramic awareness brought in, too. So there's a sense of being aware of the energy of the other person, the dynamics of the room, maybe some awareness of where Diane and I are sitting in the room as we work with them. And, it's actually usually a delight to get into that, because most people learning this, life just opens up more. You can hear more. Things are more nuanced.

PART 7: EROTICIZING OUR WOUNDS

Ken: As we move on to the next section, which is on sex, it's clearly a central feature for a lot of men's lives. And there's probably as much misunderstanding about it as any area around. You say:

“Sex can be a remarkably beautiful thing: an ecstatic communion in the flesh, overflowing with love and trust and full-blooded wonder... It doesn't promise a loving closeness but *begins* with a loving closeness, being *an expression of already-present connection rather than a means to connection*... And what's needed to access this? For starters, being committed to turning toward and

working through whatever in us remains unhealed or is being kept in the dark, whatever we have tended to try to get away from through sexual activity.”

And it turns out, and a point that you make a lot of is that, we use sexual activity for a whole lot of what are in fact non-sexual reasons.

Robert: Yeah. Put another way, we tend to burden sexuality with the obligation to make us feel better, or more whole, or more secure.

Ken: Or more masculine, or more wanted, or more... I mean, it's an endless list.

Robert: The list goes on. And when we realize the labor, in some ways, the slave labor to which we've assigned our sexuality, it can be quite a shock to recognize it. But that's the first step. And when we see that, we start the process of freeing our sexuality from those obligations so it can just be what it is, naturally. And with great compassion, because a lot of those strategies arose as “solutions” when we were younger.

If we had a very unhappy adolescence, maybe masturbation and orgasm was one area I can feel good in. And we understand the pull. But it's not so understandable for a man to let that be his go-to solution for relieving stress as he gets older. In a teenage boy, it's completely understandable. And the whole pull to pornography, it can start earlier and earlier because of the vast prevalence of it. It's so easy to get caught in these solutions to our distress and our unresolved wounds. Then we become addicted to them.

And that's very sad, because then there's a lot of work to be done there to work through that. Otherwise, we can't be in a fully healthy relationship, including sexually, with another adult, until we've worked that through.

Ken: Right, right. The statement here is:

“Sex makes us feel better—or at least relieved—in a hurry, and our culture keeps bombarding us with this promise. We see this, and perhaps cast a cynical eye, but don’t often see the various labors [in a sense, the non-sexual labors] to which we have assigned our sexuality: make us feel better, make me feel more secure, de-stress me, prove that I’m wanted, make me feel whole, console me, resurrect my sense of self, make me feel more powerful or manly, help me feel less lonely. Sex has a lot on its back—we’ve saddled it with so much hope and expectation, whether in mundane or spiritual contexts.”

And your point is that, men aren’t really free, sexually, until they’ve unchained sex from the many non-sexual tasks they’ve placed on it.

Robert: Yeah.

Ken: Why is that important? It’s obvious, but who cares if people want sex to do something else?

Robert: In not having freed ourselves from that means we’re impoverished in our relationships. We may still have sex, feel some degree of release: “That felt good.” But it can be so, so much more if we were to not expect sex to do this for us; not to eroticize our wounds and act out our old stuff through sexuality. Then we can be with a partner where we come to sex already present, already connected, already loose, so there’s no pressure on sex to provide anything. And when we go into sex that way, it can be truly magical, because there’s no pressure. It’s just intimate communion.

Ken: So it should be a way to celebrate that, not achieve that?

Robert: Yeah, exactly. And I think real deep sex is a celebration of already-

present connection. I often say, the deepest aphrodisiac is full-out intimate connection, which doesn't rely on friction or certain strategies of arousal, because the very connection itself is arousing. It's an aphrodisiac. And it invites one to be sexual, not just where you maximize erotic sensations, but where you're wide-open emotionally, wide-open spiritually, and you are so present with your partner. There's no way you'd want to pull away to do a pornographic fantasy in some back corner of your mind. She or he is fully there, and that, itself, is the turn on. And in that, there's no goal. Orgasm ceases to be the goal. The goal, as such, is simply to remain absolutely present and to allow the currents and rhythms of sex to go in whatever direction they want to. So it's like you're riding a beautiful wave, not aiming for some far-off goal of an orgasm of some sort.

Ken: Right. This is an interesting point—a little bit on the side, still on the topic, but almost an academic footnote. This says:

“In my work with men, I've not yet heard of a sexual fantasy or pornographic pull that was not directly and clearly related to childhood and/or adolescent dynamics.”

So, say a little bit about that.

Robert: Well, I learned years ago that when I heard a sexual fantasy, especially one that is highly-arousing for a man, and I stripped the fantasy of all eroticism, what was left were the psychological/emotional underpinnings of his early years, his conditioning.

It could be as simple as wanting to be wanted and having been rejected a lot. And that got sexualized, and his strongest pull became to be deeply wanted. That's what he found was the turn on. When you take away the sexual part of that fantasy of being profoundly wanted (not having to buy her dinner or speak nicely to her, she

just wants you unconditionally), stripping that out of its eroticism usually lead back to earlier scenes of him just really craving a type of contact he didn't get. And just as he didn't get it as a boy, he still wanted it. He still wanted it. And of course, that lead to fantasies of having that in sexual contexts.

And once he wakes up to that connection, as he sees the connections between past and present, then he starts to slowly step out of requiring fantasy for his arousal—the fantasy of a woman who would want him no matter what. And he steps into the real world more. And he, in a sense, leaves his childhood behind, and his adolescence, as he enters into adult relationships that are strongly sexual without that burden of the past.

Ken: Right. The actual sexual action, the actual story that is present in the fantasy, is very obvious. It's very literal. It's very present. All you have to do is just take the sex away...

Robert: Also Ken, it's that person's self-created story. So actually, it's quite fascinating in the details. I had a men's group a while ago. For the last hour or couple of hours, I wanted each man to tell me the sexual fantasy that turns them on the most. They were a little squirmy at first, but then they got into it. And as each one told it, I took away the erotic part and showed how it tied into early life. And what a liberating thing for them to be part of.

To see: here's these old wounds; here's parts of my history that I've simply sexualized and was acting out. And what turns me on is the fulfillment of those old desires which weren't primarily sexual but became secondarily sexual. And when we cease being caught in that, we're free to enter a truly adult sexuality.

Ken: So, the old, standard, Freudian notion that the actual core story isn't just literally there and fully available, but is in fact covered in symbolism and

mechanisms that convert it into hard-to-recognize symbols and stories that are driven by primary process, with all sorts of condensation and displacement and all of that—none of that really makes sense. It's more just, no, these are quite literal, straight. You just read them right there. There's no hidden symbols or nothing like that?

Robert: No, it's very straightforward. And when most people hear it, there's a sense of relief. They go, "okay," because they know that's their history. And they say, okay, here's the explanation of how you got from there to where you are now, where you're caught up in fantasies that act that out.

But I think the core of this is what I call eroticizing our wounds. The first step is, something happens to us that hurts us when we're little, and we develop a charge with it—a compelling excitation that's usually negative, but it can also be positive. But there's a sense of excitation around it. For example, we may have a charge around being rejected by one parent, quite strongly. And that doesn't feel good, but this is charged. We get a little older and we plug that charge into sexual outlets. We're then acting out either the rejection or the opposite.

Perhaps we're acting out being in a position where we cannot ever be rejected. We're in charge of the pornography we're looking at. We're in charge of our fantasy. And then we find release from the tension of that old wound, and also an obscuring of it. So we're acting it out, but we don't see that we're acting it out. And also, the sexual release from ejaculation and orgasm creates a sense of ease. And that cycle can go on and on and on. And it can get quite complex.

Someone may be into BDSM. Turns out, they like being hit. Turns out, when he was a boy, yes, he got beaten a lot. There's a lot of charge with it, an excitement—an unpleasant excitement, but it was a charge. And he gets older. He finds some

release from that old wound through sexualizing it. But he's not doing this consciously. It's all unconscious. It's in his shadow.

When this is brought into the open, then there's a liberation, a gradual liberation from chaining our sexuality to such a task. So I took pains to do a chapter on that called, "Eroticizing Our Wounds." I thread that theme through some of the other chapters. I wanted to make it as explicit as possible.

Ken: Also, your stance on pornography is just a little unconventional, certainly for the typical therapist. Your view is that, essentially, no form of pornography would be found in any mature relationship. So you say:

"Pornography is especially common in me-centered relationships, being indulged in so much that it is often viewed as part of a healthy sex life. In we-centered stages of relationship, overt pornography may be uncommon and strongly suppressed; or it may be common and given an excessively tolerant nod. And in truly mature relationships, pornography is absent, the pull to it simply having been outgrown."

So what is the story on pornography there?

Robert: Well, pornography connects genitals and mind. And it also, therefore, reinforces the tendency to fantasize. If someone is with a partner and needs to fantasize in order to have "good sex," it's going to block the intimacy—maybe not fully, but a lot. I found in my work, men who are really caught up in pornography cannot meet their partners fully. There's so much shame around it. Even if there's an okaying of it, the woman knows that he, perhaps, has that going in the back of his mind when he's with her sexually. It creates a lot of distance. I think the degree we're involved in pornography is the degree to which we cannot be in a fully mature relationship with another.

It's not about pornography being bad, or great, or something we shouldn't embrace in kind of a liberal fashion. It's more like: What does it take to outgrow it? I think outgrowing it is what I've found is the most skillful thing. Because the steps one takes to outgrow pornography, that I've listed, actually deepen you. They actually require more of the growth that we talked about in the early chapters.

So I think it's a journey that men who are caught up in pornography need to take. As long as they're pulled into porn, especially the darker varieties of porn, it just makes them less accessible for flat-out, full-out relationship.

Ken: Right. And sort of in the same vein, looking at something like breast implants, you say that:

“It is apparently important to increasing numbers of women to have bigger or perkier breasts—and probably even more important to many men—to the point where such physical alteration is becoming part of the new normal... Getting breast implants is now the most popular cosmetic surgical procedure in the United States, with liposuction coming in second...”

So, what is going on there?

Robert: Well, the subtitle is, “Mammary Mania.” Our culture is so obsessed with it. And it's as if it's innate, it's natural. It isn't. Other cultures don't have this.

I remember going to Bali in the early 70's a couple of times, and most of the women were bare-breasted then. The Islamic government of Indonesia had not yet prohibited that. And their breasts were not erotic objects. What was erotic for the men there was the way the women walked, their behinds, their overall presence. But the breasts themselves were out front. And the breasts could be perky, young women's. Old women had breasts that hung straight down, from all the breast

feeding. But their backs were so straight. They were very beautiful. There was no shame or pride in their breasts. It's just simply like elbows, knees. It was just part of the body. It hadn't been compartmentalized like we have in our culture.

Our culture, I think, has a fetishistic orientation towards breasts. I mean, Janet Jackson showed a flash of her breast in the Super Bowl years ago, during the break. And the whole country went mad. I mean, here's a breast for a few seconds: "Oh my God!"

I see so many women that are driven to get implants, partially for their lower self-esteem, but mainly because they know that most men in their circles are going to like that more—even though it can cut sensation. Many women have complained to me that they can't feel their breast anymore. They've lost sensation. It's like men who get hair transplants. They've got a nice head of hair, but their forehead has gone completely numb. They have no sensation in the scalp.

So it's a matter of, like, here's this fixation. And I think it's compounded by a lot of our advice mothers have been given in our culture, especially in our earlier generations, of breastfeeding on schedule. "Don't breastfeed." So here's this wonderful source of nourishment, so close to that little boy, a toddler, and yet he can't have it. And I think that's part of it. There's also a fear of the breast. Think of that Woody Allen film where he's brandishing a crucifix of enormous breasts that's squirting all over him. We have such a focus on it.

And the danger is, a lot of men can look at women and the eyes drop automatically to the woman's breasts, or the head swivels to take that in. And it's very automatic. And the women with those men often feel a lot of pain seeing that almost automatic fixation on other women's breasts. It's not that we shouldn't look. But if we look in a way that compartmentalizes the woman so we just see her breasts,

we're missing something. It's just like when we compartmentalize the penis, or any other body part. We're missing something.

PART 8: FULL SPECTRUM HEALING

Ken: So now we get into some of the closing sections, and this includes the chapter on “Full-Spectrum Healing: Bringing Together All That You Are” [Part V, Ch. 28]. You say:

“To heal is to make whole... Healing is about illuminating, opening to, and integrating all that you are, including the aspects of yourself that you have denied, neglected, ostracized, or disowned. This is far from a short-term process, asking that you move into and through it at a pace that doesn't overstretch or unduly tax you, a pace that allows for proper digestion and assimilation... But move we must, if we are to heal...”

There are generally two different dimensions here. One is healing, and one is growth or development. So, if I say I need healing, it means I'm sick—something's wrong, but I was once whole; I was once healed. And so the implication is that I can recover what I lost. This is often referred to as the “recaptured model” of goodness. And then, growth is not a recapture. Growth is an emergence—something entirely new and different. It evolves, emerges, comes into being, and that's never been present before. So this isn't a recaptured goodness, but a growth to goodness.

Now, therapy usually is healing, because there is some part of you that was once present, but it was repressed, it was denied, it was disowned. And that does require a recapture—a going back and getting. But development is growth and emergence.

It's not a going-back and recapturing something, because moral stage 5, for example, isn't recapturing moral stage 1. Moral stage 5 (what [Jane] Loevinger called the "integrated" stage, or [Jean] Gebser called the "integral" stage, or etc.) has almost no parallels with moral stage 1. That's not a recapture of some earlier stage...

Robert: To really make the wisest use as we can out of a higher stage, and moving even further, we need to be as intimate as possible with the earlier stages.

Ken: Yeah, understood. But they're two different entities. You agree with that?

Robert: In part. I think, though, there's more overlap than maybe you're indicating.

Ken: Well, they both go together, particularly because, at any stage of growth, you can disown, deny, or create shadow material.

Robert: Yes.

Ken: So, I'm actually one of the few theorists that believes, unlike Freud [and others who conclude] that all major repressions end around age seven or eight, I believe that they can occur at any stage of development.

Robert: And also, people can skip stages, too.

Ken: People can't skip real stages.

Robert: Then they have to de-crystallize, and it's very painful work—go back and take care of that earlier stage that was moved through too quickly and not digested properly.

Ken: Right. A real stage is like atoms to molecules to cells to organisms. You can't go from atoms to cells and skip molecules.

Robert: Exactly.

Ken: So, just keep in mind both of these.

Robert: We can bypass certain things so easily. We have that capacity. It seems like we've moved further than we have, when we haven't. I also think that to heal, fundamentally, is not about cure. It's about making whole. And I think when there's a deeper sense of wholeness, then we have more ground to expand and emerge into deeper, fuller stages.

Ken: Yeah. Throughout the book, you don't use the terminology of emergence and new levels, and so on. You use terms like right here. What we're out of touch with is, "denied, neglected, ostracized, or disowned." Those are all past-tense terms. Those are all terms of something we had and lost, not something that we never had but has to emerge. I just wanted to suggest that both of these are important, and that you might want to just give a little more emphasis to the emergent component.

Robert: Sure, sure.

Ken: You then go through, "Integrating Body, Mind, Emotion, Psyche, and Spirituality," which I thought was, by and large, very good. And so you say:

"A relationally rooted, integrative approach to healing takes into account *all* of our dimensions—physical, mental, emotional, psychological, sexual, social, and spiritual—cultivating intimacy (hence *relationally rooted*) and working with them in the context of our innate wholeness. In this approach, no part of us is left out or marginalized. *Everything* that we are is considered in the process of our healing.

What follows provides some framework for what it means to work in this way, with your body, mind, emotions, psyche, and spirituality."

So, “Working with Your Body” includes “regular body-centered workout. Incorporate aerobic, weight-bearing, and stretching work.”

Working with Your Mind:

“Most of what arises in your mind arises unbidden. Becoming aware of this is the beginning of meditation. Observing what your mind is doing, and maintaining this awareness for more than a few minutes is not easy, but must be learned if you are to cease being automatically run or hooked by what passes through the mind. Become more aware of the spaces between your thoughts,” and so on.

And then, Working with Your Emotions: “Become more emotionally literate.” And of course, you have a book, “Emotional Intimacy,” and people can contact that.

Ken: And then, Working with Your Psyche, including, “Get familiar with your various parts—the inner critic, the child, the adolescent, the self-doubter, and so on.”

And then, “Working with the Spiritual,” including things such as, “Healthy spirituality is not an escape from life’s difficulties, but an awakened embrace and illumination of them. It is love and nonconceptual awareness functioning as one.”
[p 265]

So, those are all absolutely crucial components. And of course, as you’re going through them in this book, the idea is also looking at them from what would be an authentic masculine approach to that.

And then finally, in terms of drawing it together, you say the following. And I’ll just read two paragraphs of the conclusion.

“You are on a quality quest, making your way to what really matters, breathing courage and integrity into your stride, no longer shaming yourself for—invariably—stumbling as you proceed. Instead of trying to get rid of your flaws, you are learning to compassionately relate to them, sooner or later finding that they’re no longer in the way.

And you’re recognizing that your softness and vulnerability are not problems, but sources of strength, coexisting with your resolve, guts, drive, and ability to get things done, whatever the challenge.”

Call it a full-blooded odyssey to the heartland of true masculine power and what it means to be a man.”

And so there you are, after this wasn’t something that you thought about doing, but was suggested by Tami Simon and Sounds True. And it turned out to be a pretty good guide to the whole thing.

Robert: What a labor of love.

Ken: [Laughter]

Robert: I mean, I gave myself to this and I thought, ‘Okay, when I’m in, I cannot back off.’ And I’m glad I did that. And I really appreciate how thoroughly you read it. And I know at the last part, we were both getting a little tired. But it was a great journey.

Ken: Well, I just hope that you recover sometime in the next year or so and are ready to start writing again.

Robert: You got a topic for me?

Ken: [Laughter] I’ll think about that. Thank you so much for giving us this time,

my friend.

Robert: Take care, Ken.

Ken: Okay. Thank you, sir.